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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3887
INFO USMISSION GENEVA
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UNCLAS BOGOTA 08685

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SUBJECT: FARC KIDNAPS FORMER MINISTER OF CULTURE AND 10 OTHERS

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR ANNE W. PATTERSON. REASONS 1.5(B)
AND (D).

11. (U) SUMMARY: FORMER MINISTER OF CULTURE CONSUELO ARAUJO NOGUERA AND SOME 10 TO 25 OTHER HOSTAGES WERE KIDNAPPED BY THE FARC NEAR VALLEDUPAR, CESAR DEPARTMENT, ON THE AFTERNOON OF SEPTEMBER 24. ARMY SOURCES CLAIM THE HOSTAGES' CARS HAVE BEEN SPOTTED FROM THE AIR IN A MOUNTAINOUS REGION NORTH OF VALLEDUPAR, AND THAT ARMY TROOPS ARE ENGAGED IN AN AGGRESSIVE RESCUE OPERATION. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) FORMER MINISTER OF CULTURE CONSUELO ARAUJO NOGUERA WAS KIDNAPPED, ALONG WITH BETWEEN 10 AND 25 OTHER PEOPLE, ON THE NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 24 IN YE DE LA VEGA, LOCATED 15 MINUTES' DRIVE NORTH OF VALLEDUPAR, THE CAPITAL OF CESAR DEPARTMENT. AS OF MID-MORNING SEPTEMBER 25, THE ARMY REPORTED THAT TWO BATTALIONS HAVE MOBILIZED IN AN AGGRESSIVE RESCUE OPERATION, AND AIR FORCE HELICOPTERS HAVE SPOTTED THE HOSTAGES' CARS FROM THE AIR IN A MOUNTAINOUS AREA NEAR PATILLAL, A SMALL CITY LOCATED APPROXIMATELY 30 KILOMETERS NORTH OF VALLEDUPAR. THE ARMY HAS ENGAGED THE FARC IN THIS AREA, AND ONE SOLDIER HAS BEEN KILLED, BUT ARMY SOURCES ARE OPTIMISTIC THAT THEY CAN FREE THE HOSTAGES QUICKLY.

13. (U) ARAUJO IS THE WIFE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL (PROCURADOR GENERAL) EDGAR MAYA VILLAZON, AND SOURCES SPECULATE THAT ARAUJO HERSELF, A MEMBER OF AN IMPORTANT CESAR POLITICAL FAMILY, MAY HAVE BEEN THE PRIMARY TARGET OF THIS KIDNAPPING. MAYA, WHO IS NOT COMMENTING TO THE PRESS AT THIS TIME, REPORTEDLY HAS TRAVELED TO VALLEDUPAR AND IS PARTICIPATING IN A SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING TODAY WITH CESAR DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS. ARAUJO IS A MAJOR AND WELL-LIKED PUBLIC FIGURE. SHE IS THE FOUNDER OF A FESTIVAL WHICH PROMOTES COLOMBIAN MUSIC AND WHICH HAS BECOME A MAJOR ENTERTAINMENT EVENT AND SOURCE OF TOURIST REVENUE FOR HER NATIVE TOWN OF VALLEDUPAR.

14. (U) IT HAS NOT YET BEEN CONFIRMED HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE BEING HELD. ACCORDING TO THE OFFICE OF THE MAYOR OF VALLEDUPAR, 10 PEOPLE (INCLUDING 3 STAFF FROM THE MAYOR'S OFFICE) ARE CONFIRMED KIDNAPPED, BUT THAT NUMBER COULD BE AS HIGH AS 25. SEVEN OF THE NAMES, INCLUDING THOSE OF ARAUJO'S TWO BODYGUARDS, HAVE APPEARED IN THE PRESS, BUT POLICE ARE KEEPING THE OTHER NAMES CONFIDENTIAL. ACCORDING TO WITNESS ACCOUNTS REPORTED SO FAR, A LARGE GROUP OF ARMED MEN WEARING CAMOUFLAGE, WHO IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS BEING FROM THE FARC'S 59TH FRONT, BEGAN STOPPING CARS ALONG THE ROAD TO VALLEDUPAR AT ABOUT 12:45 P.M., DETAINING A LARGE NUMBER OF CARS AND THEIR OCCUPANTS FOR SEVERAL HOURS. THE GUERRILLAS RELEASED ABOUT 50 HOSTAGES BEGINNING AROUND 7:00 P.M., SOME OF WHOM ARE STILL BEING INTERVIEWED BY THE VALLEDUPAR POLICE. IT HAS BEEN REPORTED IN THE PRESS, BUT NOT CONFIRMED, THAT ONE PERSON MAY HAVE BEEN KILLED. ONE OF THE RELEASED HOSTAGES REPORTEDLY TOLD THE VALLEDUPAR POLICE THAT ARAUJO AND CECILIA MONSALVO RIVERA (THE PRESIDENT OF A CULTURAL FOUNDATION) WERE SEEN BEING TAKEN

IN THEIR CAR ALONG THE ROAD TO ATANQUEZ, LOCATED IN THE
MOUNTAINOUS SIERRA NEVADA REGION.

PATTERSON

NOTE: UNC MSG WITH CLASS BY STATEMENT.

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